



History of Anthropology Newsletter

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Research in Progress

SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Archives of the Berlin Anthropological Society-- The Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte, founded in 1869, was the most important institution for the study of physical and cultural anthropology and European prehistory in Germany before the second World War. Remembered in the United States as a context of Franz Boas' earliest anthropological work, it merits attention as a peculiarly German school of anthropology, distinct from United States traditions of cultural anthropology. Its archive has survived in a single attic room in the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Berlin. Consisting of largely unordered boxes hastily packed up during World War II, the archive holds many buried treasures for historians willing, literally, to get their hands dirty digging.

Among the materials in the archive are letters from the Prussian Ministry of Culture regarding the founding and funding of the society and minutes from the meetings of the board of directors and steering committee, as well as the card catalogue of the society's library (which disappeared during World War II), and documents relating to the exclusion of Jews in 1933, when the society willingly cooperated with the Nazi Gleichschaltung, or "coordination," of German public life. Among the 19th century materials are letters from (and to) variety show impresarios, arranging for the study of non-European and deformed people performing in Berlin—which were an important source material in the pre-fieldwork period.

The archive also contains documents of the scientific activities of Berlin anthropologists, including sketches made by Rudolf Virchow in 1872 of the Neanderthal skull which he argued (to the satisfaction of many) was an injured and diseased human skull, rather than representing an intermediary race or species between apes and humans. Also important are documents from the Virchow Foundation between 1905 and 1909, which contain plans and budgets of scientific travelers, as well as the Foundation's evaluations. And there is a large photography collection including pictures of artifacts and "representatives" of various races, as well as birth defects and Wilhelm von Gloeden's erotic studies of Sicilian boys.

In short, the archive is valuable, and full of surprises, and scholars conducting research in the history of German anthropology will surely come across interesting documents not mentioned here. For more information, contact Dr. Gustav Mahr, who directs the archive, and has done a great deal of research on the Berlin Anthropological Society, at the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Schloss Charlottenburg, D-10459, Berlin, Germany. [Andrew Zimmerman]

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS:

Matthew Engelke (University of Virginia) is beginning an oral history project on Victor Turner's life and work, Edith Turner's anthropological career, and their academic relationship with one another.

Andrew Zimmerman (University of California, San Diego) is completing a dissertation on "Anthropology and the Place of Knowledge in Imperial Berlin" based on a wide range of written and visual sources, including government and museum archives, material culture artifacts, newspaper and police files relating to displays of living "natives" in zoos and cabarets, a basis for the reconstruction of anthropology not just as a system of ideas, but as a culturally embedded phenomenon involving anthropologists, the people they studied, their audiences, and their political and financial patrons.